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Memoir of the Life

OF THE MUCH-LAMENTED

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL

SIR R. ABERCROMBY,

Knight of the Bath,

LATE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE

BRITISH FORCES

IN

EGYPT.

DUBLIN:

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Memoir, &c.

GENERAL SIR RALPH ABERCROMBY, like EPAMINONDAS, like WOLFE, has died of the wounds received in a hard-fought battle, in which he was Commander in Chief, and was victorious. To his country, the loſs of ſuch a man, at ſuch a time, is ineſtimable. For himſelf it might have been ſomewhat happier, if the victory had been finally deciſive of the fate of EGYPT—more glorious it could ſcarcely in any circumſtances have been. It has crowned one of the moſt honourable military lives which hiſtory ſhall ever commemorate for the emulation of future times.

Among the military commanders of the preſent period, no one has obtained greater or more juſt celebrity, for his virtues as a man, and his abilities as an officer, than the ſubject of this memoir.

Sir Ralph Abercromby was of a very ancient and diſtinguiſhed family in North-Britain, poſſeſſed of an eſtate bearing the ſame name. His father had a numerous family, and according to the cuſtom of the country which gave them birth, the ſons were deſtined for active employments*. Each

* Thus we find one of the brothers of Sir Ralph brought up to the law, another to maritime purſuits, and two more to a military life. The ſenior filled, with great reputation to his character, the honourable office of a Lord of Seſſion, in which he died.—The next brother entered into the ſea-ſervice of the Eaſt-India Company, and made ſeveral voyages as a Commander in one of their ſhips, retiring from the fatigues of duty, with a wife he had married in India, and with a conſiderable fortune. He died in the year 1792; and, to the ſurprize of the world, and the diſappointment of his neareſt relations, left almoſt the whole of his property to his lady, who was married ſoon after to her ſolicitor, but ſurvived that connection only a ſhort time. From the nature of her will, the laſt hope of the Captain's relations was extinguiſhed. The Conveyancer had, in one ſhort trip to the land of Matrimony, poſſeſſed himſelf of all which the indefatigable navigator had amaſſed in his ſeveral voyages acroſs the Pacific and Indian Oceans. But as no part of the family could be

Each of the brothers in his peculiar profeſſion, has been engaged in ſupporting the State, in ſome one of its departments or dominions, and Sir Ralph has no leſs exerted himſelf in the ſame cauſe, on dif-

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be ſaid to be in ſtraitened circumſtances, this unexpected event was accompanied with very little regret. So far as concerned our General himſelf, whoſe diſpoſition was the reverſe of mercenary, the transfer of his brother's property from his family, did not leſſen, in the ſmalleſt degree, the affection he bore his memory. James, a third brother of the General, was killed in America, in the hard-conteſted battle of Bunkers-hill. He was at the time a lieutenant-colonel in the 22d foot. His ſurviving brother Robert, is not behind him in military rank. He is at this time colonel of the 75th, or Highland regiment, lately ſtationed at Bombay, the preſidency of which derived ſignal benefits from its Colonel's active zeal, and approved ſkill. His judicious and ſucceſsful march acroſs a vaſt extent of country, to effect a junction with the army of Lord Cornwallis, at Seringapatham, in 1792, may be conſidered as having tended to ſecure the Eaſt-India poſſeſſions in the Carnatic, againſt that once reſtleſs and aſpiring prince, Tippoo Sultan; and well entitled him to ſucceed as Commander in Chief of his Majeſty's and the Eaſt-India Company's forces in Bengal.

ferent ſtations, and in diſſimilar climates. —The firſt commiſſion he bore was, as cornet of the 3d dragoon guards, into which he entered on the 23d of May, 1756. He obtained a lieutenancy in the ſame regiment on the 19th of February, 1760; and continued in this corps till the 24th of April, 1762, when he obtained a company in the 3d horſe. In this laſt regiment he roſe to the rank of major and lieutenant-colonel, to the former on the 6th of June, 1770, and to the latter the 19th of May, 1773. In November 1780, he was included in the liſt of brevet-colonels, and on the 3d of the ſame month, next year, was made colonel of the 103d, or King's Iriſh infantry, a new raiſed regiment, but which being reduced at the peace in 1783, the Colonel was placed on half-pay. On the 28th September, 1787, he was promoted to the rank of major-general, and on the 17th September, 1790, he obtained the command of the 69th regiment of foot, from which, in April, 1792, he was removed to an older corps, viz. the 6th, from which he was again removed, the 5th

November,

November, 1795, to the 7th regiment of dragoons.

Sir Ralph was employed on the Continent, ſoon after the preſent war broke out. On the 25th of April, 1793, he had the local rank of lieutenant-general conferred on him; and, although the ultimate iſſue of thoſe two campaigns afford but a ſmall amount of glory for the moſt meritorious officers to emblazon their military eſcutcheons with, yet Sir Ralph was entitled to a full ſhare. He enjoyed on all occaſions not only the eſteem, but the confidence of the Duke of York.

He commanded the advanced guard in the action on the heights at Cateau, April 16th, 1794. The Duke of York, in his diſpatches relative to this affair, makes the following commendatory repreſentation of his conduct: "I have particular obligations to Lieutenant-general Sir William Erſkine, as well as to Major-general Abercromby." His Royal Highneſs further adds, in his diſpatches of the 19th of May: "The abilities and coolneſs with which Lieutenant-general Abercromby, and Major-general

jor-general Fox conducted their different corps, under theſe trying circumſtances, require that I ſhould particularly notice them." The Lieutenant-general was wounded at Nimeguen, the 27th of October following.

No part of the ſervice of this able officer had ever been ſo painful to him, or called ſo forcibly upon his humanity and exertion, as the duty he performed when the army retreated from Holland, in the winter of 1794. The Guards, as well as all the ſick were left under his conduct and care, after Lieutenant-general Harcourt had gone into cantonments behind the Ems. His ſenſibility was as conſpicuous as his judgment, in the diſaſtrous march from Deventer to Oldenſaal, at which laſt place his corps arrived on the 30th and 31ſt of January, 1795. This was the firſt time in the General's life, when his talents could not keep pace with circumſtances; but the inceſſant harraſſing of a victorious enemy on the one hand: bad roads, and the inclemency of the weather on the other; added to the difficulty of procuring

ring ſhelter for the men, were ſufficient to depreſs the ſpirits of the braveſt, and leave the moſt ſagacious mind without reſources.

The affairs in the Weſt-Indies, as left by Sir Charles Grey, had exhibited a leſs pleaſing aſpect ſince that Commander's return to England. The French, after their ſucceſſes nearer home, had made very conſiderable, and even unexpected exertions to recover their loſſes abroad. This object they attained to a certain degree; they repoſſeſſed themſelves of Guadaloupe and St. Lucia, made good a landing at more than one place on the iſland of Martinico, and effected partial deſcents, and hoiſted the tri-coloured flag on ſeveral forts in the iſlands of St Vincent's, Grenada, and Marie-Galante. They poſſeſſed themſelves of immenſe booty from the property of the rich emigrants on the ſeveral iſlands, but eſpecially on that of Guadaloupe. On this laſt only, according to the report made by Fermond to the Committee of Public Safety, the value was eſtimated at the enormous ſum of 1,800 millions of livres.

To ſtop the ravages thus committing on the

the Britiſh allies, for ſuch the French emigrants were then conſidered; and to check the depradations on our own colonies, a fleet was fitted out in the autumn of 1795, to convey a military force to the Weſt-Indies, ſufficient to anſwer the neceſſity of the caſe. To General Sir Ralph Abercromby was given the charge of the troops, and he was appointed Commander in Chief of the forces in the Weſt Indies. He accordingly repaired to Southampton on the 30th of Auguſt, 1795, and took charge of the remainder of the Britiſh troops that had been under the command of the Earl of Moira. Sir Ralph Abercromby was unfortunately detained in that diſtrict ſo long beyond the expected period of his departure, that after the troops had aſſembled, and were embarked, the equinox ſet in, and ſeveral tranſports were loſt in endeavouring to clear the channel. Notwithſtanding theſe diſaſters, and in ſpite of the lateneſs of the ſeaſon, every exertion was made, and the General, with his ſtaff, &c. made the beſt of their way to the Weſt Indies.

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On his arrival, no time was loſt in forming a plan for the operations of the army, and as ſoon as the ſeaſon permitted, the troops moved in every quarter. On the 24th of March, a detachment ſuddenly attacked and obtained poſſeſſion of the iſland of Grenada. The General afterwards found no difficulty in obtaining poſſeſſion of the ſettlements of Demarara, and Iſſequibo, in the province of Surinam, in South-America.

The Commander in Chief had made the neceſſary arrangements with the admiral for conveying the troops deſtined for an attack upon the iſland of St. Lucia, and the armament ſailed on the 26th of April. The enemy had a garriſon in Morne Fortune, of nearly 2,000 well-diſciplined black troops, ſome hundred whites, and a number of black people who had taken refuge in the fortreſs. In carrying the battery Seche, within a ſhort diſtance of the works of Morne Fortune, the difficulties of approach were found greater, from the intricate nature of the country, than were expected. The General was obliged to undertake

dertake a laborious communication from Choc Bay to that of Morne, by means of a new road, capable of allowing the tranſportation of heavy cannon. Theſe difficulties, with numerous other impediments which the enemy threw in the way of the army, he however, overcame; and upon the evening of the 24th of May, a ſuſpenſion of arms was deſired till noon the next day:—a capitulation for the whole iſland enſued, and on the 26th, the garriſon, to the amount of 2,000 men, marched out, laid down their arms, and became priſoners of war. Pigeon Iſland fell of courſe into the poſſeſſion of the Britiſh Commander.

Brigadier General Moore being left in quiet poſſeſſion of the captured iſland, the General haſtened the embarkation of the artillery and troops deſtined to act in St. Vincent's, and by the middle of June, every part of that valuable iſland was in the hands of the Britiſh troops.

The fortunate iſſue of all theſe ſervices, enabled the Commander in Chief to viſit Grenada, where his preſence may be ſuppoſed

poſed to have contributed, not a little, to conclude the hoſtilities ſtill carried on under the orders of Major-General Nicholls. Fedon, the celebrated chief, at the head of the inſurgents, was not eaſily to be overcome; his native courage, and acquired talents, added to his fierceneſs of diſpoſition, had drawn about him a maſs of force, partly voluntary, partly conſtrained.—Major-General Nicholls was now ordered to ſtraiten him in his retreat as much as poſſible, and to grant him no terms ſhort of unconditional ſubmiſſion. The troops were ſucceſsful every where, and nearly at the ſame hour, on the morning of the 19th of June, full poſſeſſion was obtained of every poſt on the iſland.

The General having thus effected every thing which could be undertaken againſt the French, directed his attention to the Spaniſh iſland of Trinidad. The arrival of part of a new convoy from England, enabled him to undertake this expedition with confidence of ſucceſs. The preciſion with which the fleet of ſhips of war and tranſports had been aſſembled, prevented

the loſs of a moment, when the ſeaſon for operations commenced. On the 16th of February, 1797, the fleet paſſed through the Bocas, or entrance into the gulph of Paria, where the Spaniſh Admiral, with four ſail of the line, and a frigate, were found at anchor, under cover of the iſland of Gaſpar-Grande, which was fortified. The Britiſh ſquadron worked up, and came to an anchor oppoſite to, and nearly within gun-ſhot of the Spaniſh ſhips. The frigates and tranſports anchored higher up in the bay. The diſpoſition was made for landing at day-light next morning, and for a general attack upon the town and ſhips of war. At two o'clock in the morning (the 17th), the Spaniſh ſquadron was perceived to be on fire; the ſhips, except one line of battle, were all conſumed, and that ſhip which eſcaped the conflagration, was taken poſſeſſion of by the Britiſh fleet;—the enemy at the ſame time evacuated this quarter of the iſland. The General's whole attention was now paid to the town. As ſoon, therefore, as the troops were landed, about five hundred advanced to

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the weſtward of it, meeting but little oppoſition ; and before night they were maſters of the town of Port d'Eſpagne, and of the whole neighbourhood, two ſmall forts excepted. The next morning the Governor, Don Chalcon, capitulated with the conqueror, and the whole colony paſſed under the dominion of his Britannic Majeſty.

Thus far our General had ſucceeded in fulfilling the wiſhes and inſtructions of his Sovereign. An unſucceſsful attempt upon the Spaniſh iſland of Porto Rico, concluded his campaign of 1797, in the Weſt-Indies.

If nothing was gained to the country by this laſt attempt, no loſs of reputation in its military character was ſuſtained by the failure ; and indeed the manner in which the General was received on his return to Europe, teſtified the eſtimation in which his military talents were held by the Britiſh government.

On the 2d of November, 1796, while on this ſervice, Sir Ralph (for he had now been inveſted with a red ribbon), was pre-

ſented to the ſecond, or North Britiſh dragoons, commonly called the Scots Greys; and in the ſame year he was made Lieutenant-Governor of the Iſle of Wight, and afterwards ſtill further rewarded with the more lucrative governments of Forts George and Auguſtus. On the 26th of January, 1797, he was raiſed to his preſent rank of lieutenant-general.

The ferment in Ireland threatening every day to break into a flame, Sir Ralph was not allowed to remain long in a ſtate of repoſe. He was fixed upon to take the chief command of the forces in that kingdom. He paid great attention to the diſcipline of the army, and was anxious to reſtore to the ſoldiers that reputation, which had been ſullied by repeated acts of licentiouſneſs. His declaration "that their irregularity and inſubordination had rendered them more formidable to their friends than to their enemies," however true, was deemed harſh by ſome who neither conſidered the delicacy and reſponſibility of his ſituation, nor the danger of military inſubordination, by allowing diſorders in any army,

army, like thoſe he complained of, to grow by example. The General's removal, however, from his command, was in no reſpect the effect of diſſatisfaction on either ſide, but the reſult of an unanimous opinion, that it would be expedient and efficacious to unite the civil and military authority in the ſame perſon, the benefits of which had been ſo obvious in the dominions of the eaſt. In this view of the precedent, it was impoſſible not to fix on the Marquis Cornwallis.

Sir Ralph was afterwards appointed to the chief command of his Majeſty's forces in North Britain, and he was ſoon after employed in other commands of the higheſt importance.

When the great enterprize againſt Holland was reſolved upon, Sir Ralph Abercromby was called again to command, under his Royal Higneſs the Duke of York. The difficulties of the ground, the inclemency of the ſeaſon, delays, though inconvenient, yet unavoidable, the diſorderly movements of the Ruſſians, and the timid duplicity of the Dutch, diſappointed

our hopes of that expedition. But, by the Dutch, the French, the Britiſh, it was confeſſed, that, even victory, the moſt deciſive, could not have more conſpicuouſly proved the talents of this illuſtrious officer.

His country applauded the choice, when he was ſent with an army to diſpoſſeſs the French of Egypt. His experience in Holland and Flanders, and in the climate of the Weſt Indies, peculiarly fitted him for this new command. He accompliſhed ſome of the firſt duties of a General, in carrying his army in health, in ſpirits, and with the requiſite intelligence and ſupplies, to the deſtined ſcene of action. The landing, the firſt diſpoſitions, the attacks, and the courage oppoſed to attack, the ſpirit with which his army appears to have been, by confidence in their leader, inſpired, the extraordinary ſuperiority which the Britiſh infantry under his command evinced to that which was thought the braveſt and beſt diſciplined infantry in the world, demonſtrate that all the beſt qualities of one of the greateſt of Commanders, were in Sir Ralph Abercromby united—that they

were

were all ſummoned forth into activity, in the glorious atchievements amid which he fell.

His private character was modeſt, diſintereſted, upright—unſtained by any negligent or licentious vice. He was a good ſon, brother, father, huſband, and friend, as well as an able and heroic General.

The remains of Sir Ralph Abercromby have been brought home in the Flora frigate. It will doubtleſs be gratifying to his friends, that his aſhes ſhould be depoſited under the monument which is likely to be raiſed to his memory.—The ball which ſtruck Sir Ralph, entered his thigh, and roſe upwards, ſo that it was impoſſible to extract it.

Sir Ralph not only ſerved his country as a warrior, but as a legiſlator alſo. At the general election in 1774, when his father was living, he was choſen to repreſent the county of Kinroſs in Parliament, and he continued to ſit in the Houſe of Commons till the next election, in 1780. His brother at this time repreſents the ſame county.

His diſpoſition, however, and perhaps his

his talents, were better adapted to the determined buſineſs of the field, than calculated to wade through the intricacies of political diſcuſſion. Sir Ralph Abercromby, therefore, ought more immediately to be conſidered as a ſoldier: as an independent character, he will, nevertheleſs, be eſtimable in private and political life. He was naturally reſerved, and extremely ſilent in mixed ſociety: but was never known to betray the leaſt ſymptom of haughtineſs. Men of merit always had eaſy acceſs to him, and when engaged in any particular enterprize, officers of talents ſeldom eſcaped his attention. His conduct, indeed, through life, appears to have been founded on the following remarkable lines written by Frederick the Great:

Dans des honneurs obſcurs vous ne viellirez pas,
Soldats, vous apprendrez à régir des ſoldats.

APPENDIX.

The following Letter from General Hutchinſon, who has ſucceeded Sir Ralph in the command of the Britiſh troops now in Egypt, is ſubjoined, as giving a circumſtantial account of the action in which that veteran officer received the wound that occaſioned his death.

Head-Quarters, Camp, four miles from
SIR, *Alexandria, April 5th,* 1801.

I have the honor to inform you that after the affair of the 13th of March, the army took a poſition about four miles from Alexandria (at preſent dry) and the lake of Aboukir on their left. In this poſition we remained without any material occurrence taking place till the 21ſt March, when the enemy attacked us with nearly the whole of their collected force, amounting probably to 11 or 12,000 men. Of fourteen demi-brigades of infantry, which the French have in this country, 12 appear to have been engaged, and all their cavalry, with the exception of one regiment.—The enemy made the following diſpoſitions of their army:

General Lanuſſe was on their left, with four demi-brigades of infantry, and a conſiderable body of cavalry, commanded by General Roize; Generals Friant and Rampon were in the centre, with five demi-brigades and two regiments of cavalry; General D'Eſtain commanded the advanced-guard, conſiſting of demi-brigades, ſome light troops, and a detachment of cavalry.

The action commenced about an hour before day-light, by a falſe attack on our left, which was under Major-General Craddock's command, where they were

ſoon

ſoon repulſed. The moſt vigorous efforts of the enemy, were, however, directed againſt our right, which they uſed every poſſible exertion to turn. The attack on that point was begun with great impetuoſity by the French infantry, ſuſtained by a ſtrong body of cavalry, who charged in column. They were received by our troops with equal ardour, and the utmoſt ſteadineſs and diſcipline. The conteſt was unuſually obſtinate; the enemy were twice repulſed, and their cavalry were repeatedly mixed with our infantry. They at length retired, leaving a prodigious number of dead and wounded on the field.

While this was paſſing on the right, they attempted to penetrate our centre with a column of infantry, who were alſo repulſed, and obliged to retreat with loſs.—The French, during the whole of the action, refuſed their right. They puſhed forward, however, a corps of light troops, ſupported by a body of infantry and cavalry, to keep our left in check, which certainly was, at that time, the weakeſt part of our line.

We have taken about three hundred priſoners (not wounded), but it was impoſſible to purſue our victory, on account of our inferiority in cavalry, and becauſe the French had lined the oppoſite hills with cannon, under which they retired. We have alſo ſuffered conſiderably; very few more ſevere actions have ever been fought, conſidering the numbers that were engaged on both ſides. We have ſuſtained an irreparable loſs in the perſon of our never ſufficiently to be lamented Commander in Chief, Sir Ralph Abercromby, who was mortally wounded in the action, and died on the 28th of March. I believe he was wounded early, but he concealed

cealed his ſituation from thoſe about him, and continued in the field, giving orders with that coolneſs and perſpicuity, which had ever marked his character, till long after the action was over, when he fainted thro' weakneſs and the loſs of blood. Were it permitted for a ſoldier to regret any one who has fallen in the ſervice of his country, I might be excuſed for lamenting him, more than any other perſon; but it is ſome conſolation to thoſe who tenderly loved him, that as his life was honourable, ſo was his death glorious. His memory will be recorded in the annals of his country—will be ſacred to every Britiſh ſoldier, and embalmed in the recollection of a grateful poſterity.

It is impoſſible for me to do juſtice to the zeal of the officers and to the gallantry of the ſoldiers of this army. The Reſerve, againſt whom the principal attack of the enemy was directed, conducted themſelves with unexampled ſpirit. They reſiſted the impetuoſity of the French infantry, and repulſed ſeveral charges of cavalry. Major-General Moore was wounded at their head, though not dangerouſly. I regret, however, the temporary abſence from the army of this highly valuable and meritorious officer, whoſe counſel and co-operation would be ſo highly neceſſary to me at this moment. Brigadier-Gen. Oakes was wounded nearly at the ſame time, and the army has been deprived of the ſervice of an excellent officer. The 28th and 42d regiment acted in the moſt diſtinguiſhed and brilliant manner. Colonel Paget, an officer of great promiſe, was wounded at the head of the former regiment; he has ſince, though not quite recovered, returned to his duty.

Brigadier-

Brigadier-General Stuart and the foreign brigade ſupported the Reſerve with much promptneſs aud ſpirit: indeed, it is but juſtice to this corps to ſay, that they have, on all occaſions, endeavoured to emulate the zeal and ſpirit exhibited by the Britiſh troops, and have perfectly ſucceeded. Maj.-General Ludlow deſerves much approbation for his conduct when the centre of the army was attacked; under his guidance the Guards conducted themſelves in the moſt cool, intrepid, and ſoldier-like manner; they received very effectual ſupport by a movement of the right of General Coote's brigade. Brigadier-General Hope was wounded in the hand; the army has been deprived of the ſervice of a moſt active, zealous, and judicious officer.

The loſs of the enemy has been great; it is calculated at upwards of three thouſand killed, wounded, and taken priſoners. General Roize, who commanded the cavalry, which ſuffered conſiderably, was killed in the field. Generals Ranuſſe and Bodet are ſince dead of their wounds. I have been informed that ſeveral other general officers, whoſe names I do not know, have been either killed or wounded.

I cannot conclude this letter without ſolemnly aſſuring you, that, in the arduous conteſt in which we are at preſent engaged, his Majeſty's troops in Egypt have faithfully diſcharged their duty to their country, and nobly upheld the fame of the Britiſh name and nation.

I have the honour to be, &c.

(Signed) J. H. HUTCHINSON.